/The Sedentary Tibetans/

*563 62 There is more rigidity about the village organization. The sedentary Tibetans generally have a formally selected village [622] headman. But again the council of elders has considerable [623] authority. Groups of villages are organized into a larger unit, [632] nor is it uncommon for villages and encampments to be joined [792] together in such a larger unit. A monastery is more apt to have authority over a group of villages than over the strictly nomadic people. However, like the nomads, the sedentary [622] Tibetans give very little recognition to any authority beyond that of the ecclesiastical or lay chief of the "tribe". Ma Ho-t'ien, in his Diary of Travels in the Border Region of Kansu, Chinghai and Tibet makes frequent reference to the inability of the Chinese officials to exert any sort of authority over the border-Tibetans and other sources also record the absence of any effective government beyond the local level.

The village itself represents a very tightly-knit organization, economically and politically, as well as physically. [423] Houses, housesites and the fields belong to the individual families, but the grazing lands and forests are community property. Use of the pastureland is available to all, but the village may place certain restrictions on the quantities of timber that may be taken for specific purposes.

*563 62 241 Just as the nomads act simultaneously in moving their encampments from one site to another, so the sedentary Tibetans also insist on simultaneous group action within the [787] village. The first day of spring planting, determined by horo-[292] scope, sees all the villagers proceeding to their individual fields in their best clothing. The fields are ploughed simultaneously. The seeds are sown at the same time in each field. And, when harvest time comes, all the fields must be completely harvested in the time that it takes the smallest field to be harvested with a small hand sickle. If one's fields are too large one hires extra help. During the course of the growing season all the villagers periodically parade through the fields carrying the holy books on their heads. These communal activities have both religious and economic bases. [787] From the viewpoint of the religion, if the days have been [776] selected as auspicious, they are auspicious for the community's members as a whole. It is when the spirits of the ground, [782] the demons of hail and misfortune can be allayed or propitiated that determines the best days for performing the needed tasks. From the viewpoint of economics, when the ground has been plowed and the seeds planted, the fields are encircled by a community fence to prevent onslaughts by roaming animals. [625] A community watchman also stands guard. It also means that [486] the villagers can collect a tax from caravans that pass through [651] their lands. Once the fields have been harvested, the community

2: Teichman G-5 (1919) 1921 AF13 Northwest China AF13

CHAPTER X

FROM T'AOCHOU ACROSS THE GRASS-LANDS TO LABRANG MONASTERY, AND THENCE *VIA* HOCHOU BACK TO LANCHOU FU

Difficulties of travel west of T'aochou—Tibetan houses—Grass-lands of the Kokonor border—Tibetan nomads—Heitsō Monastery—Tibetans of Amdo—Labrang—Reception by Lamas—Hochou—Mahomedans in Kansu—Mahomedans and Christian missionaries—Return to Lanchou.

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THE journey from Old T'ao Chou to Labrang monastery is usually made in four days, the distance being called 250 li. The track is little used and a local guide is essential, inasmuch as once on the grass-lands faint trails lead in all directions; a Tibetan interpreter is also useful, since few or no Chinese are met with *en route*. The Choni chief had very kindly deputed one of his own headmen to accompany us, since his jurisdiction extended some way towards Labrang, and the services of this man, as interpreter, guide, and sponsor were invaluable and cleared away all difficulties. We were also accompanied by half a dozen of the chief's Tibetan soldiers and as many Mahomedan braves, the latter being useful owing to the peculiar influence exercised at present by the Mahomedan leaders over the Tibetans; indeed it is commonly said locally that Labrang, formerly so bitterly hostile to the Chinese and strangers generally, is now entirely under the thumb of General Ma An-liang. It should be noted that the Kansu borderland differs at present from the same country in Western Szechuan in that the latter has been largely taken over by the Chinese, whereas the former has not. While in Szechuan, therefore, it may only be necessary to make arrangements with the Chinese officials for travel on the border, in Kansu it is necessary to arrange matters with the local native chiefs and the Mahomedans; otherwise travel west of T'ao Chou and Labrang is by no means safe. From Labrang to Ho Chou there is a mule trail much frequented by Mahomedan merchants, and no special arrangements are necessary.

[P. 138]

3:Cable & French M-5 (1926) 1927 AF13 Northwest China AF13
~~Sinkiang AF-1~~

kang, scratched by a nail in the grime of the wall, were the following lines :

'To-day we came to Ansichow ;
Midday to morn onward we go ;
All through the night carters' oil-bottles flow ;
Heat, hunger, thirst, cold I now truly know ;
The mere sight of a cart makes my courage sink low ! '

This gloomy poem referred, we knew only too well, to the next stage of the journey, spoken of by the carters as a ' thirty-mile march which, with luck might be accomplished in eighteen hours.' On the opposite wall some homesick traveller had also written :

'Tho' a man travels far, yet his heart bides at home,
'Tis the prospect of wealth that still urges him on.
But he looks for home joys when his hardships are past,
And his wife's well-trimmed lamp guides his feet back at last.'

From Ansi we entered on a period of twelve brackish water stages, and with this in view we bought some gourds as water-bottles, in addition to the aluminium flasks we always used for our personal supply, as well as a large zinc can given us by a Turki friend. There was still no fruit to be had, but cucumbers were plentiful. The Turki bakers, who formerly supplied us with excellent bread, had vanished. They were unable any longer to travel freely, and preferred returning to their own people in Turkestan. We, however, laid in good stocks of *kwo kwei*, so familiar to every traveller in Kansu. These are round loaves of bread, two inches thick, measuring two feet across, and are baked on a circular iron plate covered with an iron lid, beneath and above which straw is burnt, while the heat of the smouldering embers suffices to cook the loaf.

A few days were enough for rest and provisioning, and for the small repairs needed by the carts, then once